



# THE HIGH COST OF HIGH SCHOOL

*Many Ontario schools rely on fees for a substantial portion of their operating expenses.*

For immediate release

Toronto (March 24, 2011) – According to a new report released today by the Ontario research and advocacy group, People for Education, fees for courses, student activities and athletics are on the rise in Ontario secondary schools. Revenue raised through these fees is neither equitably distributed among schools, nor consistently accounted for.

According to Annie Kidder, Executive Director of People for Education, “The prevalence of fees clearly illustrates the many loopholes in Ontario’s Education Act and in current fee guidelines. In some schools, students must pay a Student Activity Fee in order to receive their class timetables; in others, students are charged for French workbooks and science lab materials. It is clear from our survey results that in schools where parents can afford it, students have access to higher quality learning materials, better equipment for sports and arts, and greater enrichment opportunities.”

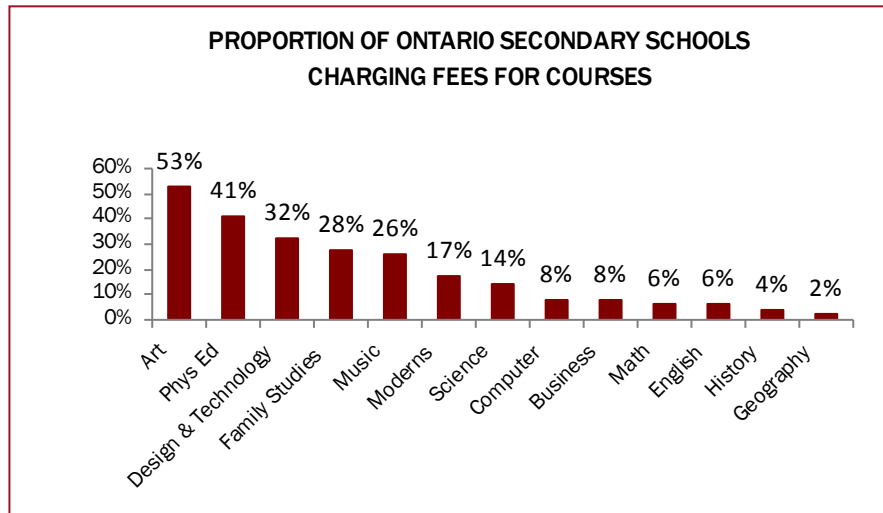
## HIGH SCHOOLS CHARGE FEES FOR REQUIRED COURSES

Data from surveys distributed to Ontario’s secondary schools, show that 17% of schools charge fees for second language classes and 14% charge fees for science—both courses in which one or more credits are mandatory for graduation. Six per cent of schools report charging fees for English classes, which are mandatory in every grade.

[Current fee guidelines](#) allow schools to charge fees for “enhancements or supplementary learning materials” or for “superior products” in courses such as music or woodworking. It is not clear from current data if schools provide parents with the two-tiered options when requests for fees are sent home with students.

After many years of trending downwards, average course fees have increased for the second year in a row. And while the average fee per course a student might pay in 2010/11 is \$25, there is a wide range

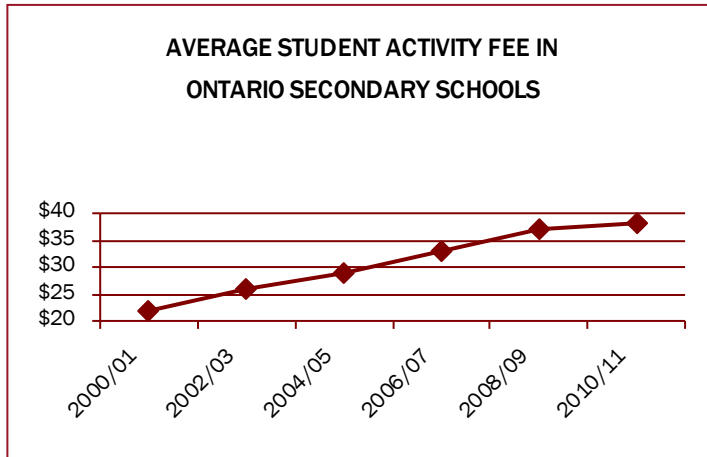
among schools, with some schools raising under \$1,000 per year in course fees alone, and others raising over \$90,000. Only a small portion of this discrepancy among schools can be explained by school size.



## FEES CHARGED ON THE BASIS OF WHAT THE MARKET WILL BEAR

The survey results, when combined with school-by-school data from the Ministry of Education’s School Information Finder, show that schools with a higher proportion of low income students have lower average course fees. This suggests that fees are charged on a “what the market will bear” basis. There is also a clear gap in revenues from course fees: the top 10% of schools charging fees takes in the same amount as the bottom 65%.

## STUDENT ACTIVITY FEES AND FEES FOR SPORTS



Survey results also show that Student Activity Fees are on the rise. Just as with course fees, there is a wide range among schools: Some schools charge as little as \$5, while others charge up to \$100 per student.

Not only do students pay Student Activity Fees, but many also pay fees to play after-school sports. These Athletic Fees have also increased steadily over the last 10 years. This year, Athletic fees ranged from a low of \$10 to a high of \$1,800. The highest fee this year is more than twenty times higher than the top fee in 2000/01.

## PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ENSURING EQUITY

Student trustee, Zane Schwartz, President of the Public Board of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, says students have been raising concerns about fees for years. "Fees build inequity into the system and they're a barrier for many students. If we want to keep students engaged and build a sense that everyone belongs in our publicly funded schools, we have to make sure there are no barriers. All students – rich or poor – should be able to play sports, take part in arts programs and take a wide range of courses. We have to do everything we can to ensure that we don't end encourage a two-tiered education system in Ontario."

## PROVINCIAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PROMISED CHANGES TO SCHOOL FEES

In 2008 and again in 2010, the Ontario government promised in its Poverty Reduction Strategy, to take action on school fees because they were "a barrier to participation in school activities for children in low-income households." The 2010 poverty reduction report said that "students should have the opportunity to fully participate in our education system, regardless of their parents' financial situation." To date, the province has not mandated any changes to fees.

## PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PROVINCE:

1. Articulate and fund a vision for education beyond targets for test scores and graduation rates that outlines what materials, activities and programs should be available at no extra charge to all students in every school in Ontario. This should include:
  - appropriate learning materials for *all* courses, including hands-on technology, arts, health and physical education and computer courses
  - access to extracurricular activities
  - participation in arts and sports programs
2. Require all schools and school boards to provide detailed accounts of all school-generated funds, including funds raised through fees, and provide provincial reports on the total amounts.
3. Establish provincial fee guidelines that:
  - clearly state which fees are not allowed
  - close current loopholes that allow schools to charge fees for courses leading to graduation, and
  - mandate that all school fees are to be voluntary.
4. Provide sufficient provincial funding to ensure that revenue lost because fees are disallowed or made voluntary, does not result in cuts to programs, resources or materials in schools.

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